

Staff, Patients and Volunteers Plant Community Gardens



Several of our community health centers have created opportunities for patients to plant and harvest their own fruits and vegetables in community gardens. These gardens are helping our patients prepare healthy and tasty meals.

Patients from the North Shore Health Center are testing their green thumbs for the second consecutive year at the Moraine Township Garden in west Highland Park. The township started the garden to provide fresh produce for the township food pantry, but for the second consecutive year the garden is also giving primary care patients at the North Shore Health Center an opportunity to grow and eat fresh produce, said Olga Aguilar, outreach worker at the North Shore Health Center's Health and Wellness Program

The Health and Wellness Program is funded with a grant from the Health Care Foundation of Highland Park and the support of Friends For Health. Friends

For Health donated the seeds, plants and compost for each patient. Choices this year were tomatoes, peppers (hot and sweet), onions, lettuce seeds, Swiss chard seeds, bush bean seeds, bush cucumber seeds and carrot seeds. A master gardener volunteered to assist each of the patients during the two planting days which attracted 66 participants.

This year, Olga said 20 plots are being used at the location in Highland Park with 19 by patients and one by the health center. Each plot measures 10 feet by 20 feet in size. The center will donate vegetables from its plot to the township food pantry and also use the vegetables in North Shore Health Center community education classes to promote use of the garden, Aguilar said.

A master gardener spoke with patients in advance of the planting about how to store vegetables through canning or jarring methods, but patients also have the option of donating fresh produce to the township food pantry. In the early fall, Nurture will be teaching cooking classes at the North Shore Health Center featuring recipes using ingredients grown in the garden. Nurture is an organization that empowers families of all ages (children, teens, and adults) with the tools and resources needed to prepare healthy and delicious meals, even when faced with limited time and budgets.

New at the garden plots this year are homemade scarecrows and a butterfly garden area where milkweeds were planted to attract butterflies, Olga said.

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Just a little further north, another community gardening project got underway with “Dig Day” at the North Chicago Community Health Center. On June 9, patients from the Be Well-Lake County diabetes management program planted an assortment of vegetables including beans, peppers and collard greens. The Community Garden provides fresh produce to the patients and their families who live in the area, which is deemed a “food desert.” With no major grocery store and limited access to fresh produce, residents of this area are often left with few options.

In its third year, the Community Garden has grown to become a valuable educational resource for more than 500 patients struggling with controlling their diabetes. With over 54,000 adult Lake County residents diagnosed with diabetes, Be Well-Lake County is a vital asset to those impacted by Type 2 diabetes. Be Well-Lake County is a collaboration between NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) and LCHD/CHC to provide high quality diabetes treatment, education, and support resources to medically underserved patients. Funding for Be Well-Lake County is provided by NorthShore University HealthSystem with philanthropy in the form of a pledge from The Auxiliary at NorthShore Highland Park Hospital, as well as charitable donations received from individuals.